

# Navigating Transitions: Practical Strategies for Success

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Advocate  
Medical  
Group

Adult Down  
Syndrome Center  
1610 Luther Lane




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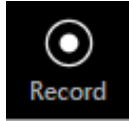
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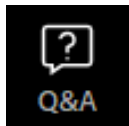
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# Reminders



- This webinar is being recorded.
  - The link to the recording and slides will be emailed to attendees within 1 week.



- Q&A
  - Please submit questions using the Q&A option.



**Katie Frank, PhD, OTR/L**

# My "why"



# Please note:

- This presentation is meant to support families, caregivers, and professionals who care about and for individuals with Down syndrome.
- The information shared today is for learning and discussion, not to replace medical or therapeutic care.
- Everyone is different. If you have questions specifically about your loved one, you are encouraged to talk to their doctor or therapist.
- Neither Katie nor Advocate Health endorse any products discussed in this presentation.

# Objectives

- Identify common characteristics of individuals with Down syndrome.
- Understand what transitions are and recognize key factors to consider during transitions.
- Apply strategies to support individuals through a variety of transitions.
- Access and utilize shared resources to aid in successful transitions.

# Common Characteristics

# Strong visual memory

## Strengths

- Good at remembering visual data
- “Video-graphic memory”

## Challenges

- Slower auditory processing
- Limited sense of time and chronological order
- Memories experienced as if happening now

# The “Groove”

## Strengths

- Functional
- Can help build routines and healthy habits

## Challenges

- Inflexibility

# Concrete thinking

## Strengths

- Follow instructions

## Challenges

- Abstract concepts difficult to grasp
- Take comments literally
- Difficulty generalizing skills across settings

# The brain

## Strengths

- Provides a unique perspective

## Challenges

- Areas of the brain that are impacted are responsible for memory, planning, decision making, problem solving, social behaviors, and attention and language.

# Receptive/Expressive language

## Strengths

- Ability to understand what is being asked of them

## Challenges

- Difficulty expressing their thoughts
- Slower processing time
- Scripted speech

# Common characteristics and transitions

## Visual memory

- Strong memory for the way things were before.
- Difficult to pull an individual out of a visual memory to transition.

## The "Groove"

- Must complete certain routines.
- Do not like unexpected changes.
- One step or process may lead into another.

## Concrete thinking

- Time is abstract.
- Inflexibility.
- Difficulty seeing alternate perspectives/needs of others.

## The brain

- Motivation
- Planning/initiation

## Language

- Difficulty expressing self may result in maladaptive behaviors.
- Receptive language can cause delays or confusion.
- May give quick or automatic responses that are not accurate.

# Transitions



# Transition definition

A change or shift from one state, subject, place, etc. to another.

(Merriam Webster)

# Difficulty with transitions may look like....

- Refusal
- Ignoring
- Moving at a slow(er) pace
- Yelling
- Crying
- Aggression
- Freezing/shutting down

# Things to consider

- Motivation
- Sensory
- Processing time
- Environment (Responses of others)
- Escape/attention/gain something
- Could there be multiple transitions in one event/activity
- Acknowledge feelings and positive strategies to address feelings

# Examples of transitions

- New school
- New teacher/staff
- New schedule
- School break
- Moving to a new home
- New job
- New boss/coworker
- Graduation from high school/transition program
- Going to college
- New roommate/housemate
- Siblings going to college/moving
- Daily transitions between activities or locations
- Seasonal changes
- Decreased mobility/functional skills/age related changes
- Death/loss of person or pet
- New nieces and nephews

# Scenarios and Strategies

# New school

- Visuals
- Tours
- Peer buddies
- Connect with a specific staff member
- Set up for success in the classroom/workspace so routine is established day 1
- Modified schedule to start

# New teacher/staff

- Pictures
- Meet and greet
- Build in flexibility with aides or 1:1's in case someone is absent
- Start with appropriate boundaries
- For high school where classes and teachers change frequently acknowledging different rules for different environments
- Former teachers/staff connect with new staff to discuss strategies and preferences

# New schedule

- Visuals
- Practice for the change in schedule (wake up at the new time, go to bed earlier, etc.)
- Build in breaks
- Try to keep some consistency if needed (peer buddy, same classroom aides, etc.)
- When possible, make the change at a time that will make most sense to the individual

# School breaks

- Visuals (calendars)
- Maintain consistent sleep/wake schedule
- Academic/learning activities to do over the break
- Keep consistent routines (get dressed every day, do chores, etc.)

# Moving to a new home

- Create the schedule or routine you want to have in the new space
- Visuals (story about new house and routine)
- Tour new house
- Discuss things that will remain the same
- Give them a choice of bedrooms if possible
- Reason for moving:
  - Clean slate with new bedding and furniture etc.
  - Same things in the new house. If they want things to remain the same, don't make additional changes.
- Validate and address feelings

# New job

- Check-ins
- Rules and expectations
- Review social skills
- Practice the idea of breaks and lunch time frames beforehand
- Resource review

# New boss/co-worker

- Pre-meeting with former boss and new boss
- Keep routines that are working
- Teach/model coping strategies
- Visual schedule

# Graduation from high school/transition

- Talk with school staff/case managers about options
- Activities after graduation
  - Create a plan and start talking about the plan before graduation
- Maintain a consistent sleep/wake schedule
- Opportunities for socialization, learning, movement
- Discuss the changes that happen with friends
- Validate feelings

# Going to college

- Be aware of all areas to prep (living on own, class, social, sleep)
- Visuals may work
- Tour the campus
- Map out the daily schedule to ensure it is feasible
- Create rules
- Check-ins with RA or disability resources office
- Consider the best living arrangement options (roommate, dorm, apartment with an aide, home & commute)

# New roommate/housemate

- Review resources
- Address the various transitions that are happening
- Work together to establish rules and routines
- Meet in advance and discuss needs and preferences
- Use organizational tools/items to help share spaces

# Sibling going to college, moving out or away

- Schedule phone calls or Facetimes or visits
- Identify on calendar when they will be visiting next
- Allowing for involvement like picking out a housewarming gift
- Validate feelings: Grief? Jealousy? Frustration?
- Be aware that every time sibling comes home to stay, that is a change to routine

# Daily transitions between activities/locations

- Visuals
- Plan (set everything out or up to make initiation easier)
- Give a sense of purpose—an associated task or responsibility
- Timers

# Seasonal changes

- Visuals
- Put clothes away from previous season
- Create excitement about the change of season (weather, holidays, activities)
- Engage in activities related to change of season (shopping for new clothes/shoes, home décor, planning desired activities)

# Decreased mobility/Functional skills

- Build in extra time
- Alter environment
- Provide modifications
- Use adapted equipment as needed

# Other age-related changes

- Use visual supports to explain the changes
- Anticipate some of the challenges and provide accommodations to assist
- Simplify tasks

# Death/Loss of person or pet

- Begin talking about death before it happens
- Use the real words
- Explain it clearly
- Allow for feelings and the expression of feelings for all family members
- Understand that grief may be delayed
- Provide ways to remember loved one with photos etc.
- Model coping strategies
- Plan ahead about how the death may lead to other transitions (change to schedule, routine, living arrangements, etc.)

# New nieces or nephews

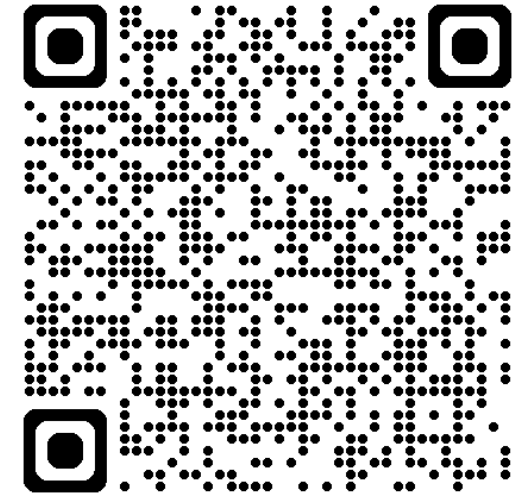
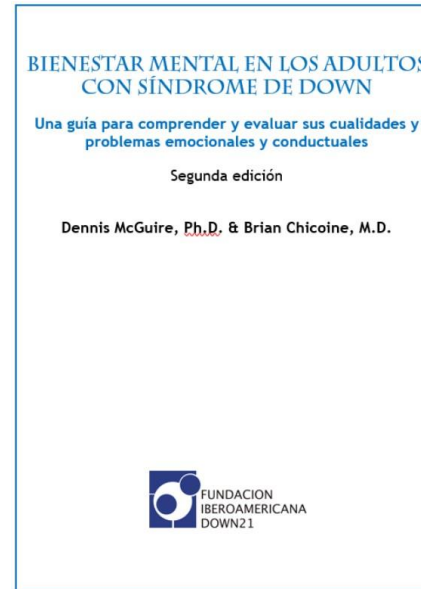
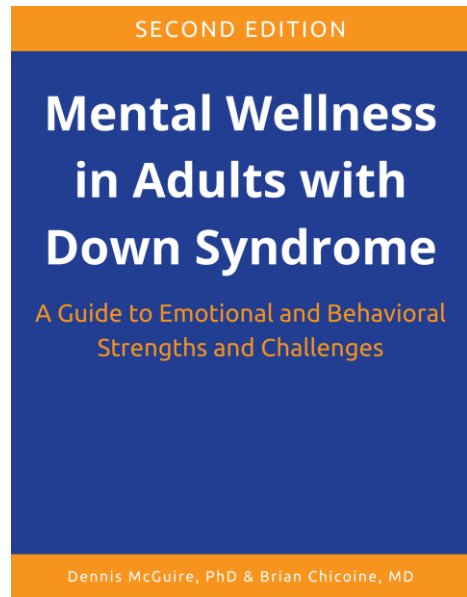
- Talk about the new arrival before it happens
- Talk about their role as the aunt or uncle
  - Set clear guidelines
- Understand if they do not want to be around the new baby
- Allow for feelings and the expression of feelings
  - While everyone may be excited, they may feel a sense of grief
- Build in 1:1 time with the sibling or yourself

# Key takeaways

- Individuals with Down syndrome have unique strengths and challenges.
- Transitions are multi-layered and often more complex than they appear.
- Successful support requires understanding underlying factors.
- Visual supports, structure, and preparation are powerful tools.
- Emotional validation and communication matter.
- Collaboration with caregivers, staff, and professionals improves outcomes.
- Every individual is unique, so strategies must be individualized.

# Resources

## Mental Wellness in Adults with Down Syndrome: A Guide to Emotional and Behavioral Strengths and Challenges



Available in English and Spanish

# When Things in My Life Change

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In life, things change.

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When Things in My Life Change Visual Story

# When Staff Members Leave

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My staff member \_\_\_\_\_ is leaving my \_\_\_\_\_  
work, group, home, day program, etc.

Their last day is/was \_\_\_\_\_

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When Staff Members Leave Visual Story

# Coping with Grief

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When someone I care about dies, I might have strong feelings.

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Coping with Grief Visual Story

# When a Pet Dies

Everyone and everything that is alive, dies at some point.

When a pet dies, everything inside the pet stops working.

Their heart stops beating. They stop breathing.

They no longer feel when something hurts. They cannot feel if something is hot or cold.

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When a Pet Dies Visual

# MENOPAUSE

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Menopause Visuals

Things I Cannot Control/Change ❌	Things I Can Control/Change ✅
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other people's emotions</li> <li>Other people's thoughts</li> <li>Other people's actions</li> <li>Some rules at work, school, or home</li> <li>Things that happened in the past</li> <li>weather</li> <li>traffic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My thoughts</li> <li>My words</li> <li>My choices</li> <li>My actions</li> <li>My effort</li> </ul>

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Things I Can and Cannot Control Visual

Clothes for Cold Weather	Clothes for Warm Weather
<p>When it is cold outside, I need to wear a coat. I may also need a hat, scarf, and gloves. I wear pants and long sleeve shirts when it is cold. I wear shoes and socks. I may even need boots!</p>	<p>When it is warm outside, I can wear shorts, t-shirts, and dresses. I can wear sandals if warm, but I can also wear my tennis shoes. I may even get to wear my bathing suit if I am going to the pool or beach!</p>

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Choosing Clothing for Cold vs. Warm Weather

<h2>First</h2>
<h2>Then</h2>

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First/Then Template

# Questions?

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